



THE SHAKESPEARE THEATRE  
OF NEW JERSEY | EDUCATION  
PRESENTS

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! 2023

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## STUDENT-TEACHER STUDY GUIDE

COMPILED AND ARRANGED BY  
THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF  
THE SHAKESPEARE THEATRE OF NEW JERSEY



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## In This Guide:

How to Use This Guide.....	p2
Shakespeare: Helpful Tips & Words of Encouragement .....	p3
About the Playwright.....	p4
Shakespeare’s London .....	p5
Shakespeare’s Verse.....	p6
“Are you SURE this is English?” .....	p7
<i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> : An Introduction .....	p8
<i>Midsummer</i> : A Short Synopsis.....	p9
Aspects of <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> .....	p10
Who’s Who in <i>Midsummer</i> .....	p11
Sources and History of the Play.....	p13
Commentary and Criticism .....	p14
Shakespeare’s Common Tongue .....	p15
Terms and Phrases Found in <i>Midsummer</i> .....	p15
What Did He Say/Who Said That - Quizzes .....	p16
Topics for Discussion .....	p17
Test Your Understanding Quiz.....	p18
Follow-Up Activities .....	p19
Sources for this Study Guide .....	p20
Answers to Quizzes .....	p20
About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey .....	back cover

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

What we hear most from educators is that there is a great deal of anxiety when it comes to Shakespeare; seeing it, reading it, and especially teaching it. One of the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's education programs is to demystify Shakespeare, take him "off the shelf," and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond a visit with The Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this guide will help you expand your students' understanding of Shakespeare in performance as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum State Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this Study Guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the guide given limited classroom time.

## BEFORE THE SHOW

- Short Synopsis (p.11) ~5 minutes of class time
- Who's Who (p.9) ~5 minutes of class time
- About the Playwright (p.4) ~10 minutes of class time
- Introduction (p.8) ~10 minutes of class time
- Go over verse and vocabulary activities (pp. 6, 7, and 15) ~20 minutes of class time
- One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period. I am told that the reading of Old English and Middle English texts was "quite entertaining and very informative."

## DURING THE SHOW

- Assign students aspects of the play to be on the lookout for: a line, costumes, set design, music, etc. Find examples on page 10.

## AFTER THE SHOW

- Topics for Discussion (p. 17) ~20 minutes of class time
- Commentary & Criticism (p. 14) ~20 minutes of class time
- Quizzes (pp. 16 and 18)
- Follow-Up Activities (p. 19)

We hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the Study Guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

Happy Teaching,



Brian B. Crowe,  
Director of Education



The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's  
Main Stage

# SHAKEPSEARE: Helpful Tips & Words of Encouragement

**“Just plunge right in**

(to Shakespeare). See a play, read it aloud, rent a video, listen to a tape. It's up to you. When you look at Shakespeare close up, he's not as intimidating as when he's seen from afar.”

Norrie Epstein  
*The Friendly Shakespeare*

Tragedy can have humor,  
and great comedy always  
has elements of the tragic.

18th-century critics complained that Shakespeare's tragedies weren't consistently serious enough. According to the classic rules, tragedy should be uniformly somber. Shakespeare's use of humor in his tragedies prevents us from becoming washed away in a dense fog of emotion. Rather, it forces us out of the “tragic” long enough to appreciate the level to which the play's passions have taken us.

“Some of the plays have taken on mythic proportions. By myths, I mean we grow up knowing certain things about [Shakespeare's] characters but we don't know how we know them.

There are lots of  
**SHAKESPEAREAN MICROCHIPS**  
lodged in our brains.”

Charles Marowitz, director

“It was Olivier's *Henry V* that made me realize that  
**Shakespeare is about real people**  
and that his language wasn't simply beautiful poetry.”

Robert Brustein, director

Don't be afraid to  
**LISTEN,  
WATCH  
AND REACT;**  
laugh, cry, and be moved.  
Shakespeare wrote for a live and active audience. Both audience and actor must be involved to create a truly winning performance.

“My advice to anyone seeing Shakespeare:

**Don't worry so much!**

Just make sure your ears are clean and your eyes are sharp. Listen and look and watch.

Look at the distance people stand from each other; look at the relationships being developed.

**Stay with it.**

Don't negate the move that Shakespeare will make toward your gut, toward your soul—

because he will touch you there, if you allow yourself to be touched.”

-David Suchet, actor

“There are some parts of the plays you'll never understand. But excuse me, I thought that's what great art was supposed to be about.

**DON'T  
FREAK  
OUT  
OVER  
IT!”**

Peter Sellars,  
Director

# About the Playwright

**William Shakespeare**, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592 he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote approximately 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare's plays were not considered exceptional by his educated contemporaries. By 1608, Shakespeare's

involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died on April 23, 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the *First Folio*. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called *quartos*, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the *First Folio* texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.



## A MAN OF MANY WORDS

Shakespeare used over **20,000 different words** in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1,700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them.

To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the King James Bible uses only 8,000 different words. Homer is credited with using approximately 9,000 different words in his works. Milton is estimated at using 10,000 different words in his works.

## THE SONNETS

You might have thought that Shakespeare wrote the sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of "stepping stone" to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.

# Shakespeare's London

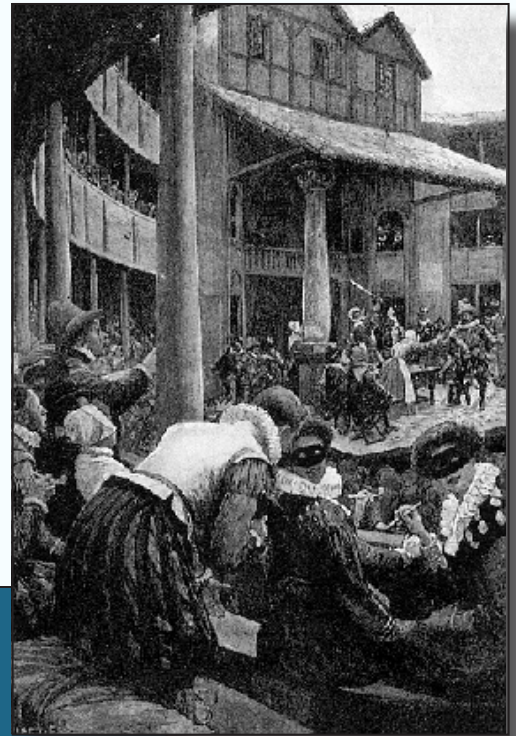
In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, London was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most days centered around making a living or going to church, the theatre offered a main source of diversion for Londoners. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appealing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare's plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare's day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare's company of actors, was an active social center easily accessible to Londoners. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors maintained a relatively low status, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade work. The aristocracy's desire for entertainment however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and

sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron. Shakespeare's acting company was originally named "Lord Chamberlain's Men" after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later, under the patronage of King James I, they were known as "The King's Men," an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Outbreaks of the Black Plague (the bubonic plague) frequently erupted, killing thousands of citizens. Theatres, shops, and the government were all shut down during these times in hopes of preventing the spread of the disease.

Elizabethans were unaware that the disease was being spread by the flea and rat populations, which well outnumbered the human population of London at that time.



## HEARING A PLAY

*The Elizabethans were an audience of listeners. They would say, "I'm going to hear a play," not "I'm going to see a play." The Elizabethan audience would pick up on words and their various meanings that we wouldn't.*

Marjorie Garber

Speaking in rhyme is not natural to us, but it was to the Elizabethans, so we have to understand what language meant to them, and what language does not mean to us today. If I were an Elizabethan and I wanted to impress you as a lover, I wouldn't send you flowers. I would come and woo you at your feet and recite to you a sonnet I had written just for you— no matter how bad it was. Elizabethan England was a world where people sang, talked, and breathed language.

# Shakespeare's Verse

Shakespeare's plays are written predominantly in "blank verse," a poetic form preferred by English dramatists in the 16th and early 17th centuries. It is a very flexible medium, which like the human speech pattern, is capable of a wide range of tones and inflections. The lines, which are usually unrhymed, are divided into five "feet," each of which is a two-syllable unit known as an "iamb." Each iamb is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Blank verse is technically defined as unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Here is a selection of blank verse from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the stressed syllables in **bold** type:

Theseus: To **you**, your father **should** be as a **god**;  
 One **that** compos'd your **beauties**, **yea**, and **one**  
 To **whom** you **are** but as a **form** in **wax**  
 By **him** imprinted, and within his **pow'r**  
 To **leave** the **figure**, or **disfigure** it.  
 Demetrius is a **worthy gentleman**.

Hermia: So **is** Lysander.

Theseus: **In** himself he **is**;  
 But **in** this **kind**, **wanting** your **father's** **voice**,  
 The **other** **must** be **held** the **worthier**.

In this short selection you can see a variety of speech tones indicated by the verse. The regularity of the rhythmic pattern and the use of full lines to complete his thoughts give Theseus a sense of calm and authority. Hermia's brief response, which breaks the iambic pattern, is only a fraction of a line, suggesting that she is impassioned and saying only a portion of what she is thinking. Theseus however, completes her line and restores the iambic pattern, indicating his authority and the fact that he is, at this point in the play, literally overbearing her will.

Notice that while the blank verse pattern is generally iambic, even in this short passage there are instances where the pattern of stress is broken. The play would quickly become monotonous if the characters spoke in nothing but perfect iambic pentameter—fortunately for audiences, Shakespeare's rhythms often become jagged and jarring to reflect the tension and conflict among his characters. Trying to determine where the rhythm of a line is regular or irregular provides important clues for the actor trying to understand what the character is thinking or feeling. As in real life, choosing to change the stress-bearing syllable may radically alter the meaning of what is being said.

Other clues are provided by word order and punctuation. There were few established rules for either in Shakespeare's time, so he was free to experiment with unusual syntax. As in our daily speech, the sentence structure (as indicated by both word order and punctuation) helps the reader or listener understand both the literal meaning of the sentence and the emphasis. A comma may indicate a new portion of the same idea, while a dash breaks into the sentence to insert a new idea, and a period suggests the completion of one idea and the start of another. Editors of Shakespeare over the years have quarreled bitterly about what punctuation the Bard "meant" to use or "should" have used. As an actor or reader of Shakespeare, it is up to you to decide if a comma, dash, or period makes the meaning of the line most clear.

## THE HEART OF THE POETRY

The alternating unstressed-stressed pattern of blank verse has often been compared to the rhythm of the human heartbeat. When a character in Shakespeare is agitated, confused or upset, the rhythm of their verse often alters, much in the same way a heartbeat alters under similar conditions.

## BOY, OH BOY

In Shakespeare's England, it was against the law for women to perform on the public stage. For this reason, the female roles in plays were always performed by males, usually teenage boys who were of slighter build than the other actors, had higher voices, and no facial hair.

Shakespeare jokes about this in *Midsummer* when Flute tries to be excused from playing Thisbe on the grounds that his beard has begun to come in. The text also leads us to believe that a short boy in the company would have played Hermia, while a taller young man took the role of Helena.



# Are You SURE This Is English?

Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write in Old English, or even Middle English. **PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURIES WROTE IN MODERN ENGLISH.** Shakespeare spoke (and wrote in) the same language which we speak today. It is possible to be thrown a bit by grammatical “carry-overs” from earlier English [“thee” and “thou” instead of “you”] and the poetic liberties that Shakespeare took, but there is no doubt that the words and syntax used in his plays can be understood today without any “translation.” To help clarify this point, here are some examples of Old, Middle, and Modern English.

## Old English (500 - 1150 CE)

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in BCE 55-4, the Celtic (pronounced KEL-tic) tribes lived in the British Isles. Their language survives today in the forms of Gaelic (Scotland and Ireland), Welsh (Wales) and Manx (Isle of Man). Early English developed primarily from these sources as well as influences from invading Germanic tribes. This meltingpot of a language is now commonly known as Old English. It also includes influences from the Latin spoken by Catholic missionaries from Rome and the Scandinavian dialects of Viking raiders and settlers.

### WHAT DID SHAKESPEARE SOUND LIKE?

While we may associate Shakespeare with the “refined” British accent of an Sir Ian McKellen or Dame Judi Dench, linguistic scholars suggest that the closest approximation to the London accent of Shakespeare’s day is the accent heard nowadays in the Appalachian region of the United States or in the regions outside England. David and Ben Crystal explore Shakespeare’s original pronunciation in this video.



#### What does Old English sound like?



#### selection from *Beowulf* author unknown, ca 800 CE

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaðena prëstum,  
monegum mægðum meodo-setla oftëah,  
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærert wearð  
fëasceaft funden, hë þæs frofre gebað,  
wëox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þàh,  
oð-þæt him aeghwylc ymb-sittendra  
ofer hron-råde hÿran scolde,  
gomban gylðan. þæt wæs god cyning!

#### IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*Often Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since first he lay  
friendless, a founding, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who lived by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gift: a good king he!*

## Middle English (1150 - 1450 CE)

The conquest of England by the Norman army in 1066 brought great changes to English life and the English language. The Old French spoken by the Normans became for many years the language of the Royal Court and of English literature. Over time, the spoken English still used by the lower classes borrowed about 10,000 words from French, as well as certain grammatical structures. By the time English reappeared as a written, literary language in the 14th century, it only distantly resembled Old English. This German-French hybrid language is known as Middle English.

#### What does Middle English sound like?



#### selection from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, ca 1390 CE

But natheless / while I haue tyme and space  
Er that I ferther / in this tale pace  
Me thynketh it acordant to resoun  
To telle yow / al the condiciun  
Of eeche of hem / so as it seemed to me  
And whiche they weere / and of what degree  
And eek in what array / that they were inne  
And at a knyght thanne wol I first bigynne.

#### IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*But nonetheless, while I have time and space  
Before I continue in this story  
I think it appropriate to speak of,  
To tell you, the condition  
Of each of them, as it seemed to me.  
And who was who, and of what degree,  
And in what fashion each was dressed.  
And with a knight then I will begin.*

## Modern English (1450 - present day)

With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the English language began to develop and mutate at an unprecedented rate. Books, previously a precious and expensive commodity, were now widely available to anyone with basic literacy. Works in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese were being translated by the hundreds, and the translators found it necessary to borrow and invent thousands of new words. English trade and exploration fueled even more cultural and linguistic exchange. The early Modern English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been referred to as “English in its adolescence”; daring, experimental, innovative, and irreverent.

#### selection from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, ca 1595 CE

*Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! No, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare...*

# A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Introduction

Considered Shakespeare's most successful, popular comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has something for everyone. From the regal elegance of the Athenian court to the lowbrow antics of the "rude mechanicals"; from the passion-filled plights of the lovers to the mischievous magic of the fairies, *Midsummer* is sure to please almost any audience. It is the most frequently produced Shakespeare play, and some say it is in performance somewhere in the world every day of the year.

In creating this hilarious, silly, and sometimes deeply moving play, Shakespeare pulled situations and ideas from many diverse sources: merging Greek myth, European folklore and his own firsthand knowledge of English country life into a tightly-woven rollercoaster ride of a play.

At the heart of the play, as in most Elizabethan comedies, are issues of love and marriage. "Midsummer madness" was a colloquial phrase to refer to someone sick with love, and the play can be seen as a celebration of love's magic (and madness) in many stages: adolescent love, as exemplified by the two pairs of young Athenians; adult love, as seen with Theseus and his captive bride-to-be, the Amazon queen

Hippolyta; and from the perspective of a long-married couple struggling with their less-than-perfect relationship, Oberon and Titania.

Like in many of Shakespeare's plays, there is a movement from chaos, conflict, and danger to a restoration of harmony in the human and natural worlds. At the opening of the play, Hermia is given a choice between marrying a man she does not love, being put to death, or living a life of chastity in a convent. Helena is desperately in love

with a man who now refuses her. On a more cosmic scale, the feud between Titania and Oberon over the custody of a human child has turned the weather topsy-turvy. When the fairies begin to intervene in the dilemmas of the humans, this already-troubled world falls further into chaos and disarray. The delusions of love are compounded by the illusions of magic.

But just as the chaos reaches its peak, Shakespeare magically resolves the dilemmas of humans and fairies alike and returns the world to a state of blissful, primordial harmony. As Puck puts it:

*Jack shall have Jill;  
Nought shall go ill;  
The man shall have his mare again,  
and all shall be well.*

## MIDSUMMER'S EVE

Midsummer Eve, the Vigil of St. John the Baptist, June 23, was traditionally a time of magic, when spirits supposedly walked abroad and played their tricks upon mortals. It was a time for certain traditional rites, such as the burning of bonfires, which go back to the fertility celebrations of pre-Christian Britain. By using certain magical charms, it was believed maidens on Midsummer Eve might have dreams of who their true loves were to be. In general, the season was associated with love and marriage, and it is appropriate that Shakespeare would choose such a title for a marriage play.

## CRITIC'S CORNER

"Shakespeare uniquely took pains to work out a fairly elaborate and outrageous plot for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Inventing plot was not a Shakespearean gift; it was the one dramatic talent that nature had denied him. I think he prided himself on creating and intertwining the four different worlds of character in the *Dream*."

Harold Bloom

## NIGHTTIME IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

The Elizabethans believed that night was the time of spirits and demons. Though many contemporary thinkers would scoff at such a notion, one must consider what nighttime was like for the Elizabethans. In pre-modern times, the night lacked the artificial glow that chases away complete darkness today. Only the moon, stars, and scattered lanterns and candles illuminated the Elizabethan night.

In the dim flicker of these limited light sources, it is easy to imagine supernatural encounters. A dead tree jostled in a breeze can be transformed into a hideous monster, or a darting bird can become a fleeing spirit. Because these sights were never seen in the bright daytime, Elizabethans believed that ghosts held domain over the night, and the first signs of the dawn (such as the crowing rooster) chased evil spirits away.

# Midsummer: A Short Synopsis

The story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be best explained by dividing it into its three basic units: the Royals and Lovers, the Mechanicals, and the Fairies.

## THE ROYALS AND THE LOVERS:

As Duke Theseus and Hippolyta prepare for their wedding, Egeus, a nobleman of the town, comes before them to seek assistance with his disobedient daughter, Hermia. Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius, but she wants to marry Lysander. According to the law, she must marry the man her father chooses or die. Theseus acknowledges that Egeus has the law on his side, but offers Hermia the alternate choice of becoming a nun. Lysander and Hermia decide to elope. Before they leave, they see Helena, Hermia's best friend, and tell her of their plans. Helena is in love with Demetrius and, in hopes of proving her loyalty to him, tells him of Hermia's escape. As Lysander and Hermia travel through the woods the following night, Demetrius attempts to track them down with the love-sick Helena close in tow. While in the woods, fairies play tricks on the young lovers. Through magic, Demetrius and Lysander both suddenly fall madly in love with Helena. This confusion leads to a quarrel which Oberon, King of the Fairies, stops. Oberon then has his henchman restore the relationships to their rightful state: Demetrius in love with Helena, and Lysander in love with Hermia. When they wake the next morning, the Duke overrides the law and decides to allow Lysander and Hermia to marry. Demetrius, transformed by the evening in the woods, proclaims his renewed love for Helena. They joyously return home and are married alongside Theseus and Hippolyta.

## THE MECHANICALS:

Several of the local workers have decided to perform a play for the Duke on his wedding day. Peter Quince, a local carpenter, gathers the craftsmen thought best skilled to perform the play: Nick Bottom, Francis Flute, Tom Snout, and Snug. Bottom, a weaver with great aspirations to be an actor, is cast as Pyramus, a noble young man. Flute, a young man with a high voice, is cast as Thisbe, the girl that Pyramus loves. The group decides to rehearse in the woods outside town so that they won't be disturbed. When they meet to rehearse, they too are subjected to fairy pranks. Puck, a very mischievous spirit, replaces Bottom's head with that of a donkey. This sight frightens the other craftsmen so badly that they run home, leaving Bottom alone in the forest. Titania, who has been sleeping nearby, awakes and, through a spell cast by Oberon, falls madly in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Later, when Titania and Bottom are released from the fairy spells, Bottom believes that he has had a wonderful dream and rushes off to find his friends. Reunited once again, the Mechanicals hurry off to the palace and perform their play, "Pyramus and Thisbe," for the Duke's wedding.

## THE FAIRIES:

When the play begins, Titania and Oberon, Queen and King of the Fairies, are feuding because Titania refuses to give Oberon a human child (a changeling boy) left in her care. Furious that Titania will not give him the boy, Oberon uses a magical flower to place a spell on her. The spell will make the Fairy Queen fall in love with the first creature that she sees when she wakes, no matter how hideous it might be. When she awakes, the first creature she sees is Nick Bottom, a mortal on whom Puck has placed a donkey's head. She falls madly in love with the transformed man and orders her fairies to wait on her new love, feeding and entertaining him. Before releasing her from his spell, Oberon takes custody of the changeling boy. No longer fighting, Titania and Oberon go with the rest of the fairies to celebrate Duke Theseus' wedding day.

## BEWARE THE MIDSUMMER MADNESS

Saying that someone is suffering from "midsummer madness" was a proverbial way of saying that they are sick with love.

Isaac Asimov notes that "there is a folk belief that extreme heat is a cause of madness (hence the phrase 'midsummer madness') and this is not entirely a fable. The higher the sun and the longer it beats down, the more likely one is to get sunstroke, and mild attacks of sunstroke could be conducive to all sorts of hallucinatory experiences. Midsummer, then, is the time when people are most apt to imagine fantastic experiences."



Oberon and Titania in the 2023 touring production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Photo: Sarah Haley

# Aspects of *Midsummer*

## TRANSFORMATIONS:

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity.  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.

*Midsummer*, I.i

“Love transforms ordinary people into rare and perfect beings. When we fall in love, we suspend reason and overlook the flaws of our beloved.”

Laurie Rozakis

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Shakespeare*

Transformations, whether induced by magic or inspired by love, abound in *Midsummer*. There are the obvious transformations, such as Puck's prank on Bottom and the effects of the love charms cast on Lysander, Demetrius and Titania, but there are also subtler and more profound changes that the characters experience during their night in the forest.

Helena enters the woods lonely, dejected, and self-pitying, then finds herself suddenly the object of two men's affection. Through this experience, she becomes aware of how unattractive such an excessive (and obsessive) affection can be— one of the factors that has made her undesirable to Demetrius. In confronting Demetrius, Lysander and Hermia, she seems to find a personal strength and inner beauty that she seemed unaware of before entering the woods.

Lysander and Hermia flee Athens in hopes of finding a “happy-ever-after” life somewhere else. Their bright-eyed naiveté

makes them ill-prepared for the challenges they must face as they begin their life together, even a challenge as seemingly simple as a walk in the woods. Their experience in the forest gives them a taste of worldly pain and tests the strength of their love. In the end, they awake as a more mature couple, one ready to face the real world together as adults.

Several other characters experience similar transformations. Demetrius, a selfish, “disdainful youth” at the beginning of the play, awakes from the “dream” with a voice of quiet maturity and responsibility. Theseus, who in Athens has insisted on the letter of the law, has a change of heart in the woods and allows love to take its course. Even the self-absorbed actor, Bottom, seems quieter and more awe-struck when he awakes, more aware of the world around him.

Shakespeare's use of transformations in *Midsummer* guides the audience not only through a series of playful hijinks, but also down a road of personal enlightenment for the characters and, through them, for us.

## FAIRY EVOLUTION 101:

The Elizabethans had a very different image of fairies than we do today. When modern audiences picture fairies in their minds (under the influence of the Victorians and especially J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*), they are most often tiny winged creatures, glowing with magic, but frail, beautiful, and kind to humans. This was far from the Elizabethan idea of the Fairy Kingdom, although Shakespeare's play itself played a significant role in creating a more romantic and benevolent image of fairies.

For centuries, fairies were a source of fear and anxiety for many communities. These beings were believed to be forces of nature, fiendish creatures that were sometimes seen as little different than the demons of hell. Fairies were blamed for all kinds of mishaps, from a freak storm that destroyed the crops to a “spooked” horse that threw its rider. At best, their behavior towards humans was prankish, at its worst,



Hermia and Helena feud in the 2023 touring production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Photo: Sarah Haley

## Who's Who in *Midsummer*

### THE ATHENIANS

**Theseus**– Duke of Athens, and betrothed to Hippolyta.

**Hippolyta**– Queen of the Amazons, defeated by Theseus, and now betrothed to be his bride.

**Philostrate**– The principal servant to Theseus and the court.

**Egeus**– A noble Athenian and father to Hermia.

**Hermia**– A young woman of Athens who falls in love with Lysander against her father's wishes.

**Lysander**– A young man of Athens who is in love with Hermia; he plots their escape from Athens.

**Demetrius**– A young man of Athens who has been chosen by Egeus to marry his daughter. Previously, he had a relationship with Helena.

**Helena**– A young woman of Athens and closest friend to Hermia. She is in love with Demetrius.

### THE MECHANICALS

**Peter Quince**– A carpenter of Athens, and the self-appointed director of the Mechanicals' play.

**Nick Bottom**– A weaver with great aspirations of being an actor. He is cast as Pyramus in the Mechanicals' play.

**Francis Flute**– A bellows-mender, who is cast as the fair Thisbe in the play despite his protest.

**Tom Snout**– A tinker, or mender of household items made of tin

**Snug**– A joiner, or a builder of furniture.

### THE FAIRY KINGDOM

**Oberon**– The king of the fairies and husband to Titania.

**Titania**– The queen of the fairies and wife to Oberon.

**Puck**– Also known as Robin Goodfellow, he is the prankster henchman of Oberon.

**The Fairies**– Creatures serving Titania.

**The Changeling Child**– A child born to one of Titania's priestesses, who is taken up and cared for by the fairy queen, to the great consternation of her king.

malicious and frightening, such as the belief that fairies would steal human babies away by night and replace them with grotesque "changelings."

The Elizabethan fairies evolved from several traditions: Celtic tales of nature spirits and "little people," Germanic legends of kobolds, gnomes, and dwarves, and the Greco-Roman myths about satyrs, fauns, and nymphs. These remnants of pre-Christian mythologies survived particularly in folktales and oral traditions, but the belief in them, especially in the countryside (such as Shakespeare's native Stratford) was often real and intense.

Elizabethans had a number of methods for warding off the wrath of fairies: farmers would leave a small amount of fruit or grain unpicked in their fields, while others would leave a saucer of cream or a slice of bread out at night. These food offerings were supposed to help placate hungry fairies. Various plants, metals, and symbols were also supposed to provide protection from fairy magic.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name "**Titania**" in reference to the Fairy Queen was not used prior to this play. In the writings of the ancient Greek poet Ovid, Titania is used as a name for the moon. Shakespeare may have intended to present his Fairy Queen as an incarnation of the classical moon goddess, Phoebe.

**Oberon**, on the other hand, was a well-known character from folklore and medieval literature. French authors even went so far as to explain his lineage, stating that he was the son of the Roman conqueror Julius Caesar and Morgan le Fay, the powerful half-fairy queen of Arthurian legend.

We have William Shakespeare to thank, in part, for the "cute" depiction of fairies today. For *Midsummer*, he invented a completely new type of fairy. Titania's attendants are depicted as tiny, almost insect-like sprites associated with flowers, music, and dancing. The *Midsummer* fairies may be mischievous, but they intend no real harm to the humans they encounter. Indeed, the intervention of the fairies ultimately restores peace, love, and harmony in the human world of the play.

## ARTISTIC LICENSE

Theseus is thought to have been an actual historical ruler of Athens around 1230 BCE. Most of the information about him comes only from legend, which presents him as a great warrior and conqueror, as well as a recreational seducer of women. One of the stories about him tells of his conquest of the Amazons, a tribe of fierce women warriors, and his capture of their queen, Antiope.

Eventually, Theseus persuaded his captive to marry him, and she bore him a son, Hippolytus. For this reason, Antiope is also referred to as Hippolyta (the feminine form of her son's name). The marriage did not have the happy ending that Shakespeare implies. The Amazons mounted an attack on Athens, and Antiope/Hippolyta died in the battle, fighting at her husband's side against her own people.

## FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET

Puck proclaims that he'll "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." To do so, he would need to travel over 37,500 miles per hour. That's just over 10 miles per second. In comparison, astronauts orbit the earth in about 90 minutes. Puck is moving more than twice as fast.

## YOU ARE YOUR WORK

The names of the Mechanicals mostly reflect their occupations. Bottom (the weaver) is named for a skein of yarn or thread, called a "bottom." The name of Quince (the carpenter) suggests "quines," or blocks of wood used by carpenters in building. Flute is a bellows mender-- the bellows has a fluted shape, and was used to compress air to stoke a fire or to produce sound (as in a church organ). Snout (the tinker) would have been a mender of pots, pans and kettles-- the spout of a kettle was often called a "snout" in Shakespeare's time. Snug is a joiner, which is a person who manufactures cabinets and other jointed furniture made of snug-fitting pieces of wood. Finally, in Shakespeare's time, tailors were usually depicted as abjectly poor and thus, rail-thin from hunger— in other words, "starvelings."



The Mechanicals flee from the transformed Bottom in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley

## A LONG ROAD TO TRAVEL

Lysander states that his aunt's home is "remote seven leagues" from Athens, and he and Hermia plan to walk there. A league was a unit of measurement approximately equivalent to three miles. Assuming that an average adult walks roughly 3-5 miles per hour, it would have taken them up to seven hours to travel the 21 miles on foot, and that's without considering the fact that they're traveling at night in the woods... and the fact that Lysander gets them lost.

## "YOU HARD-HEARTED ADAMANT!"

"Adamant" originally referred to a mythical substance which the ancient Greeks believed was so hard and strong that it could not be cut or broken. It comes from a Greek word meaning "not tamed," and came to refer to diamonds because they are so difficult to cut. In the Middle Ages the word was mistaken for the Latin *adamare*, "to attract," and *adamant* was used to refer to magnets. When Helena calls Demetrius a "hard-hearted adamant," she plays on both senses of the word— his heart is as hard as a diamond, but he exerts a magnetic attraction on her.

# Sources and History of the Play

Scholars estimate that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written between 1595 and 1598 since it is mentioned by Francis Meres in his book *Palladis Tamia*, published at that time. Other evidence that helps to establish the date when the play was written is found in the play itself: the character of the lion in the play-within-a-play and the wedding celebration provide the clues.

The Mechanicals' concern over depicting a lion on stage was probably inspired by a pamphlet published in 1594, which described a Scottish feast where plans to bring in a live lion as part of the evening's entertainment were cancelled when the organizers realized that the ladies would be frightened by the beast.

The elaborateness with which the play is framed around the royal wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta suggests that it was composed for a real-life wedding of great significance, probably at court. Many historians believe that *Midsummer* was first performed at the 1598 wedding of Elizabeth Gray, Queen Elizabeth's goddaughter, although no record of this has been found.

The sources of *Midsummer* are scattered and diverse, derived from both literature and popular folklore. The love story of Theseus and Hippolyta was told in the Knight's Tale of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and more facts about Theseus seem to be drawn from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, which was used as source material for other Shakespeare plays. The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is one of the stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The fairy world is both literary and traditional in its sources. Tales of goblins and sprites were common

in Elizabethan England, and Shakespeare had probably heard stories of Robin Goodfellow while he was a child in Stratford. Oberon, the King of the Fairies, was a widespread figure in folklore who had already appeared in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and in other stage and literary works. Titania and the other fairies seem to have been invented by Shakespeare from bits and pieces of the beliefs about fairies that were common in his time. The Mechanicals were probably drawn from life—mocking depictions of the “hard-handed” men who made up blue-collar London at the time.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* first appeared in print in a quarto edition in 1600, probably printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare died, it was reprinted in the First Folio with some editorial changes that seem to have their source in a theatrical manuscript of the play— one that had been used in production.

While it is not known exactly how often this play was performed in Shakespeare's lifetime, the title page of the 1600 quarto boasts that it had been “sundry times publicly acted.” When Parliament reversed the Puritan ban on theatre, *Midsummer* was one of the first plays to be revived, as a lavish musical spectacle. Samuel Pepys, who attended this 1662 production, was less than impressed, calling it “the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.” Other audiences and directors continued to return to the play however, and it enjoyed a long and varied production history. The opportunity to depict a magical forest often led early directors and designers to pull out all the stops— a production in 19th-century London featured “real rabbits.” Ballets, operas, and artwork based on the play have abounded in England and beyond.

In the 20th century, *Midsummer* began to be adapted to motion pictures. The 1935 Max Reinhardt movie, featured spectacular costumes, flocks of extras, and James Cagney and Olivia DeHavilland as Bottom and Titania. More recently, in 1999, director Michael Hoffmann brought together another all-star cast, with Kevin Kline as Bottom and Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania.

## SHAKESPEARE'S READING LIST

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and its plot is strikingly similar to that of another Shakespeare play written around the same time as *Midsummer*— *Romeo & Juliet*.

Hippolyta and Theseus in the 2023 touring production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Photo: Sarah Haley



## Commentary & Criticism

"Modern audiences tend to resist the idea of magic, but many Elizabethans still believed in fairies, only their creatures were much darker and more sinister than the bland images manufactured by Walt Disney. Their traditional habitat, the dark forest where confused travelers lost their way, belongs more to the strange tales of the Brothers Grimm. Shakespeare's moon-drenched fairy world is a symbolic dreamscape where traditional distinctions blur and disappear."

Norrie Epstein  
*The Friendly Shakespeare*

"Every single person goes into the woods at night and encounters fairies. The question depends upon what you think of a fairy. What sinks most productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the notion of a fairy as a nineteenth-century silly thing. Anytime you walk in the woods alone, they're there. Or when you dream. If a voice comes to you and says something you don't understand... that's what Shakespeare means by fairy."

Peter Sellars, director



Snug and Peter Quince in the 2023 touring production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Photo: Sarah Haley

### HE SAID, SHE SAID

"The most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."  
-Samuel Pepys

"*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a jolly holiday from reality."  
-Laurie Rozakis

"Nothing by Shakespeare before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is its equal, and in some respects nothing by him afterward surpasses it. It is his first undoubted masterwork, without flaw, and one of his dozen or so plays of overwhelming originality and power."

Harold Bloom  
*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*

"Love and marriage is the central theme: love aspiring to and consummated in marriage, or to a harmonious partnership within it. Three phases of this love are depicted: its renewal, after a breach, in the long-standing marriage of Oberon and Titania; adult love between mature people in Theseus and Hippolyta; and youthful love with its conflicts and their resolutions, so that stability is reached, in the group of two young men and two girls."

Harold F. Brooks, editor  
*The Arden Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*

"Shakespearean comedy raises the same issues as Shakespearean tragedy, only in a different key and, of course, with a different conclusion. The tragic tale of *Romeo & Juliet* becomes comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*... On one level, you can uncritically accept the comedies, simply enjoying them for their silliness; on another, you can look further and see how Shakespeare uses comic absurdities to suggest profound human values and concerns."

Norrie Epstein  
*The Friendly Shakespeare*

### WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

The Elizabethans had a slightly different definition of "comedy" than we do today. Though often quite funny, comedies of that period were not always what we would consider slap-stick laugh riots. Sometimes they were only *slightly* distinguishable from the tragedies.

So, how was one to tell the difference? Quite simply, actually. Comedies ended with a marriage or promise of marriage, while the tragedies ended with a death.



# Shakespeare's Common Tongue

**alack** — expression of dismay or shock  
**anon** — soon, right away  
**aught** — nothing  
**avaunt** — go away  
**ere** — before  
**hath** — has  
**hence** — away (from here)  
**henceforth** — from now on  
**hither** — here  
**lest** — or else  
**naught** — nothing  
**oft** — often  
**perchance** — by chance, perhaps, maybe  
**sirrah** — [pronounced SEER-uh] “hey, you” as to someone of lower status  
**thee** — you  
**thence** — away, over there  
**thine** — yours  
**thither** — there  
**thou** — you  
**thy** — your  
**whence** — where  
**wherefore** — why [literally: “where is the ‘for’ or ‘reason?’”]  
**whither** — where

## ... and the “thys” have it

Often Shakespeare will alternate his usage of “thou” for “you”, or “thy” for “your”, or “thine” for “yours”. Though the words are synonymous, there is a great deal of information that can be obtained by looking closely at these choices.

The different uses of these pronouns have to do with status, relationship, degrees of intimacy, and shifting attitudes. “You” is used in formal situations and conveys respect from the speaker. It is used when addressing royalty and parents. “Thou,” used in more informal settings, also can suggest contempt or aggression from the speaker. The use of “thou” places the speaker above the status of the person to whom s/he is speaking. Children are addressed using “thou,” “thee” or “thy.” In a conversation between two people of equal status, the use of “you” suggests that everything is going along smoothly, whereas “thou” would suggest that there is some kind of upset or unrest in the relationship.

## Terms and Phrases Found in *Midsummer*

### ACT I

**nuptial hour**— wedding day  
**solemnities**— ceremonies  
**vexation**— annoyance, anger  
**“bewitched the bosom”**— magically charmed the heart  
**“avouch it to his head”**— swear it to his face  
**“steal forth”**— to sneak out of or away from  
**lamentable**— very sad  
**gallant**— dashing and courageous  
**con**— to learn or memorize

### ACT II

**revels**— celebrations  
**“passing fell and wrath”**— angry and dangerous  
**changeling**— a human child exchanged for a fairy one  
**wanton**— wild, ungoverned  
**votress**— a female worshipper, a devotee  
**anoint**— to ceremonially dab on or apply a liquid  
**ounce**— in this case, a wild cat  
**pard**— a panther or leopard  
**churl**— a crude person, especially someone of low class

### ACT III

**chink**— a crack or narrow opening

**auditor**— an audience member, one who listens

**misprised**— mistaken

**derision**— ridicule

**juggler**— trickster, someone who practices sleight-of-hand

**canker blossom**— a diseased flower

**painted maypole**— a decorated pole used in festivals (but in this case, *Hermia* implies that *Helena* is too tall, too skinny and wears too much makeup)

**vixen**— a quarrelsome, malicious woman

### ACT IV

**amiable**— lovely and lovable

**bower**— a shaded, leafy refuge

**concord**— agreement, peace

### ACT V

**masque**— a special performance —part music, part dance, part theatre— created for a wedding or other celebration

**perchance**— by chance, maybe

**dole**— sorrow

**mantle**— a loose cloak or shawl

**confound**— to confuse

**pap**— nipple

**“my breast imbrue”**— stain my chest (with blood)

## What Did He Say?

This is an opportunity to test your comprehension of Shakespeare's language. Below you will find passages from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Answer the questions for each passage as specifically as possible.

TITANIA

The fairy land buys not the child of me.  
His mother was a votress of my order,  
And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,  
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side...  
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;  
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,  
And for her sake I will not part with him.

1. To whom is Titania speaking?
2. At what point in the play does this speech occur?
3. Define "votress" and "gossip'd."
4. What child is she discussing? Why is he important to her? What is special about him?
5. Why was the child's mother important to Titania? What happened to her?

THESEUS

I never may believe  
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.  
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehends  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact.  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

1. To whom is Theseus speaking?
2. What does he mean by "antique fables" and "fairy toys"?
3. Define "of imagination all compact."
4. What similarities does Theseus see in madmen, lovers and poets? What differences?
5. In your own words, explain how Theseus sees the madman, the lover and the poet. Are they calm or excitable, sad or merry, levelheaded or irrational? Be specific.
6. What is Theseus' main idea in this speech? Does he make a good case? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

## Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it. Two characters have two quotes each. Two characters have none of the quotes listed below.

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| A. "...the course of true love never did run smooth."  | THESEUS                   |
| B. "Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.<br>But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so." | HIPPOLYTA                 |
| C. "Nay, faith, let me not play a woman. I have a beard coming."                               | HELENA                    |
| D. "Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove<br>Till I torment thee for this injury."  | HERMIA                    |
| E. "I love thee not, therefore pursue me not."   | LYSANDER                  |
| F. "I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell,<br>To die upon the hand I love so well."      | DEMETRIUS                 |
| G. "I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me."  | NICK BOTTOM               |
| H. "I am a spirit of no common rate."  | FRANCIS FLUTE             |
| I. "And are you grown so high in his esteem<br>Because I am so dwarfish and so low?"           | PETER QUINCE              |
| J. "I will overbear your father's will."   | OBERON                    |
| K. "Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time."   | TITANIA                   |
| L. "If we shadows have offended,<br>Think but this, and all is mended..."                      | PUCK aka ROBIN GOODFELLOW |

# Topics for Discussion

## ABOUT THE PLAY

1. Shakespeare uses three distinctly different writing styles for the three groups of characters in *Midsummer* (Fairies, Royals/Lovers, and Mechanicals). How do the groups sound different? What kind of vocabulary does each group use? Do certain groups speak more in prose than verse, or vice-versa? And if they speak in verse, are there any notable characteristics of the verse they use? Why might Shakespeare have given each group its own "language" in this way?

2. Although the play is titled *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, evidence in the text suggests that the events may actually be taking place around the first of May. If this is the case, what does the title mean? What characteristics of midsummer, nighttime and/or dreaming are important in this play?

3. If the play is a "Dream," whose dream is it? Is it Bottom's dream? Titania's? Puck's? Does the "dream" in the title refer to the lovers' adventures in the woods? Or is the entire play the audience's collective dream? Support your answer.

4. The major conflicts of the play are resolved when the various couples are happily paired up. Shakespeare, however, chooses not to end the story there, but devotes a substantial amount of stage time to the Mechanicals' presentation of the tragic tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. Why did Shakespeare make the "play-within-a-play" such a large part of *Midsummer*? Are there any parallels between the play of *Pyramus & Thisbe* and *Midsummer*?

5. Transformation is a major theme in this play. How are the characters transformed from the beginning to the end? Does the situation at the end of the play represent a new and improved reality, or are these transformations only skin deep?

The love-spelled Demetrius woos Helena in the 2023 touring production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Photo: Sarah Haley



## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

1. In this production, eight actors play twenty different roles. How do the actors and the director manage to differentiate between these different characters? How did the costumes help you identify specific characters? Identify some of the strategies you saw used, and discuss whether they were effective.

2. Music in this production (both live and recorded) is used to create the different worlds of the play, and to delineate the three different plotlines. How would you describe the different kinds of sounds that are used to establish each of the different worlds?

3. How does the scenic design help to delineate the different worlds and locations of the play? What establishes the court? What changes for the woods? Were these choices effective? Support your answer.

4. How do the actors use movement to help establish the different worlds of the play? How do the royals move differently than the mechanicals? How is the fairy world unique from the world of the mortals? Be specific.

5. The artistic team for this production was inspired by the art from Eastern European fairy tales. Why do you think they made this choice? How are the worlds of the play (royals, mechanicals, and fairies) represented in this design? How does color and texture help to differentiate the groups in the play? Be specific.

# “Test Your Understanding” Quiz

- Shakespeare's plays are most often written in –
  - rhyming couplets.
  - old English.
  - blank verse.
  - prose.
- When we first meet the king and queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania, they are fighting over —
  - who is more powerful.
  - a stolen Indian boy.
  - a magical flower.
  - the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta.
- Puck is sent by Oberon to make sure that \_\_\_\_\_ falls hopelessly in love with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Titania/Bottom
  - Helena/Demetrius
  - Demetrius/Helena
  - Lysander/Helena
- Who does Hermia's father want her to marry?
  - Nick Bottom
  - Theseus
  - Lysander
  - Demetrius
- If Hermia does not wed the man her father wishes, what will be her punishment?
  - to become a nun and remain forever single, away from the sight of men
  - death
  - to be a maid servant in her father's home until she changes her mind
  - either a or b
- What play are the Mechanicals rehearsing to perform at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta?
  - The Taming of the Shrew*
  - The Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe*
  - The Murder of Gonzago*
  - Bottom's Dream*
- Complete this line: “For aught that I could ever read, could ever hear by tale or history, the course of true love—”
  - “is forever doomed.”
  - “never did run smooth.”
  - “is best followed by sending a letter.”
  - “is the only path for me.”
- Twice in the play we are told the name of Helena's father. What is it?
  - Theseus
  - Nedar
  - Egeus
  - Peter Quince
- Who does Helena tell of Hermia and Lysander's plan to flee Athens?
  - Duke Theseus
  - Egeus, Hermia's father
  - Oberon, the fairy king
  - Demetrius
- What trick does Puck play on Nick Bottom?
  - Puck turns Nick into a chipmunk.
  - Puck replaces Bottom's head with that of a donkey.
  - Puck makes Nick magically fall in love with Helena.
  - Puck does not play a trick on Nick Bottom in this play.
- The line “Lord, what fools these mortals be” is said by whom?
  - Oberon, upon seeing Titania in love with Bottom
  - Hippolyta, watching the Mechanicals' play
  - Puck, as the magically confused lovers enter
  - Bottom, as the other Mechanicals run from him in the woods
- “Puck” is the nickname for Oberon's henchman. What is Puck's real name?
  - Robin Goodfellow
  - Toby Belch
  - Nick Bottom
  - Robin Prankster
- “And are you grown so high in his esteem because I am so dwarfish and so low,” is said by whom to whom?
  - Hermia to Helena
  - Helena to Hermia
  - Puck to Titania
  - Bottom to Titania
- Hermia and Lysander plan to flee Athens for what reason?
  - to get married
  - to leave the corrupt city behind
  - to hide from Demetrius' vengeance
  - they simply need a change of scene

# Follow-up Activities

## CRITICS' CORNER:

Write a review of this production of *Midsummer*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like set and costumes). Explain what you liked about the production and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

## "ALERT THE MEDIA!"

Big events are afoot in the course of *Midsummer*: Theseus and Hippolyta have a royal wedding, Hermia and Lysander try to elope, a troupe of amateur actors get their first big break, Bottom has a very strange night in the woods, and so on. Assign the big events of the play to members of the class as if they were reporters. Using text from the Shakespeare's play as much as possible, have each student create a news story. Bring the pieces together and create a complete newspaper, television newscast, or special website news coverage.

## "I LEARN BY THIS LETTER..."

Write a letter or diary entry from the point of view of one of the characters, discussing an event or situation in the play. For example, love letters between the couples, a letter from Egeus to Lysander's father, a letter from Theseus to Egeus explaining why he changes his mind, or a letter from Bottom to Titania after he has been changed back. Alternatively, write a love poem sent by one of the play's many lovers.



## THE FIFTEEN-MINUTE MIDSUMMER:

Divide into five groups, and have each group take one act of the play. Your task is to create a three-minute version of your act, using only Shakespeare's words. Choose carefully the lines from your act that carry the most important information and advance the story. When each group is done, you will have a 15-minute version of *Midsummer* which you can perform for one another. Afterwards, discuss both the process of adaptation and how your "abridgement" compared to *Shakespeare LIVE!'s*.

## HE SAID/SHE SAID/THEY SAID:

Choose one of the scenes from the play that has both male and female characters in it and act it out in class three times: once with an all-male cast, once with an all-female cast, and once with the roles assigned according to gender. How does the casting affect your interpretation of the scene? Is one version inherently funnier or more tragic or more emotional? Discuss the various versions of the scene in light of the fact that, in Shakespeare's time, all the female roles in the play (Hermia, Helena, Titania and Hippolyta) would have been played by boys since it was illegal for women to appear on stage.

## PLAY/PAUSE/REWIND:

Available versions of *Midsummer* on video include the 1935 Warner Brothers film, the 1968 RSC production, the 1982 NYSF Central Park production and Michael Hoffman's 1999 film. Choose two versions of the same scene, such as the meeting of Oberon and Titania in II.i, and show each to the students, asking them to observe how the actors in each production speak, interpret, and move to the language. Make liberal use of the pause button to stop and ask specific questions, then rewind and let them watch the entire scene through uninterrupted. How are the two versions of the scene different? How are they similar? Which version was easier to understand? Why? Support your answer.

## TEACHERS:

*Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers).*

*Send your suggestions to [education@ShakespeareNJ.org](mailto:education@ShakespeareNJ.org), and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.*

Bottom performs in PYRAMUS AND THYSBE for Theseus and Hippolyta in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley

# Sources for this Study Guide

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FREEDING SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE by Kristin Linklater

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THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

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Oberon, Titania, and the Fairies in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley

## "Test Your Understanding"

### Quiz Answer Guide

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. B  | 11. C |
| 2. B | 7. B  | 12. A |
| 3. C | 8. B  | 13. A |
| 4. D | 9. D  | 14. A |
| 5. D | 10. B |       |

## Who Said That? Answer Guide

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| A. Lysander      | G. Nick Bottom |
| B. Helena        | H. Titania     |
| C. Francis Flute | I. Hermia      |
| D. Oberon        | J. Theseus     |
| E. Demetrius     | K. Theseus     |
| F. Helena        | L. Puck        |

The Mechanicals conclude their play for Hippolyta and Oberon in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley



Titania and the Fairies in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley

Bottom, Snout and Flute perform in PYRAMUS AND THISBE in the 2023 touring production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. Photo: Sarah Haley



# About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

## Our Mission

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's mission is two-fold: to bring new, relevant life to the world's classics for a diverse audience; and to use those masterworks to provide transformative experiences on stage and in classrooms. As a teaching theatre, the company is dedicated to using the classics as interdisciplinary teaching tools for artist training and arts education.

## A Brief History

Founded in 1963 by Paul Barry and Philip Dorian, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the oldest and most prestigious classical theatres in the nation, serving approximately 75,000 children and adults annually. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the East Coast, the company marks its 60<sup>th</sup> season in 2022.

Designated a Major Arts Institution by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the company is a member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance, the statewide association of professional theatres; and a member of ArtPride New Jersey, the Shakespeare Theatre Association, and the Madison Arts and Culture Alliance.

For six decades, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey has worked tirelessly to preserve dramatic masterworks, contribute to the vitality of our community, and serve the unique needs of artists, students, and members of the general public. We advocate for the public value of the arts in everything we do and endeavor to relay the message that the classics are relevant and meaningful for everyone. As we continue to celebrate our artistic distinction and the massive impact we have had in the education arena, we are mindful of the responsibilities that come with our longevity and status in the community, and we'll continue to strive for excellence in all of our programming.

Each year we present five to six productions on our Main Stage, the F. M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, located on the bucolic campus of Drew University in Madison, and each summer we offer an additional production at our Outdoor Stage, the Greek Theatre at St. Elizabeth University in neighboring Florham Park. The company is also a preeminent provider of theatre education programs in New Jersey, offering numerous distinct opportunities that serve students, teachers, emerging artists, and members of the general public; all promote literacy, community, collaboration, creativity, and cultural advancement.



**ShakespeareNJ.org**

**The Thomas H. Kean Theatre Factory: 3 Vreeland Road, Florham Park, NJ 07932**

**The F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre: 36 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940  
on the campus of Drew University**